



# STATES OF TRANSITION: A STUDY OF COFFEE CULTIVATION IN JAVA IN 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

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## ABSTRACT

Coffee cultivation in Java is a mixture of several transitions in the existing scenario, both for native people and nature. This paper, which tries to bring together all these transitions or changes, is a holistic study of the coffee cultivation in Java. The approach is not chronological, but trying to see the system with pre-occupied notion of stagnation and transitions, with the divisions integrated by three grand themes- transition in ecological system, transition in the power and positions of the intermediate groups between Company and direct producers and finally the transitions in peasant life and condition. First, in the ecological system, new phenomenon came on the place of centuries-long interaction between the nature and peasantry; second, formation of new class to control the system, the gradual, trial-and-error construction of a more centrally controlled system that eventually became the basis for the colonial exploitation of Indonesian economy. Each of these themes has the same logic of focusing on the changes. By their interaction they give an overall picture of the unique character of coffee cultivation in Java.

**KEYWORDS:** coffee, Java, transition, VOC, peasantry, colonialism.

## Introduction:

Governor General of Dutch colonial government in Indonesia, Johannes van den Bosch (served 1830-34), the cultivation system's proposer, argued that the Cultivation System would be advantageous for both colonizer and colonized. (Frederick and Worden, 1993) Of the various aspects of cultivation system with special reference to coffee cultivation in Java, this was one of the major products of cultivation system, will form the chief monument of this essay. The introduction of cultivation system of 1830 invigorated Indonesian economy as a ground of significant study. It is for that reason that it cannot be executed as only a history of economic developments. The need of revisiting the effects and consequences of Cultivation system draws notice even further back to the system, because, especially in the case of coffee, it was already started as a product before the introduction of cultivation system. Yet this is very much a renewal of old system of feudal order, rather than a market oriented economic structure, as shown in the various literatures on the coffee cultivation in Java. By contrast the literatures on sugarcane cultivation in Indonesia at that time, apart from the excellent study of historian Mason C. Hoadley (1994) and Robert W. Hefner (1990), there are no overview of Java's coffee cultivation. And even these two literatures are not detailed in the sense of every aspect. The rising bulk of thorough scholastic literature of the cultivation system has not been studied from the perspective of coffee cultivation. In the glow of the in general study of cultivation system, this is rather mystifying and perpetuates a precarious need of understanding of the connections between coffee cultivation and the cultivation system as a whole. In this context, I want to discuss in brief about the pioneering work of Clifford Greetz named, "Agricultural Involvement". This work, though are not profound in the history of coffee cultivation in Java, and though criticised hugely by later historians, are very helpful in this regard. It deployed a succinctly packaged past mainly focused on Java's enduring rural poverty and apparent social immobility. His main argument that "the Dutch colonial economic policy shown a tendency towards rigidification.....isolating native society from international economic and political currents", (Greetz, 1963) is the basis of my articulation in this essay. This theory is later criticised by historians and these criticisms are none the less true in some aspects (like sugar production), but I found it very relevant in case of coffee cultivation.

## Brief History of the Development of Coffee Cultivation in Java:

Coffee is a comparative newcomer in world trade, in fact being unidentified exterior its local Ethiopia until the fifteenth century. It then spread slowly through the Arab, Persian and Turkish worlds of Islam. It had reached Mecca in time to be prohibited there in 1511. Because it was the Arabs who first planted the coffee bush as a cash crop and traded its beans, Linnaeus labelled the plant *Coffea Arabica*. This variant dominated the trade until 1900. Grown mainly in the Arabian Peninsula, coffee had become a fashionable drink in Cairo and Istanbul long before Europeans began to flavour its delights. Although like other sophistications of the Muslim world it entered Europe through Venice, about 1615, it was only in Paris and London that it achieved the celebrity that made it a world-traded product. The first London cafe was opened in 1652, while a Turkish delegation to Paris popularised coffee as a medicinal drink in French high society from 1669. In 1661 the VOC began shipping coffee beans from Mocha to Amsterdam to serve the increasing demand. By the 1680s cafes were proliferating in France, Germany, England and Italy (Bulbeck, 1998).

Taken together the exports of Java and Sumatra, which had averaged about 2000 tons a year throughout the period 1750-90, with no inclination to go up, reached an average in surplus of 20,000 tons in the 1820s. This tenfold growth at a time

when Dutch authority is usually supposed to have been in confusion places the following performance under the cultivation system in viewpoint. Governor-General van den Bosch's Cultivation System (*cultuurstelsel*) was applied to the by now flourishing coffee industry in 1832, with the rule that all coffee grown in Java must be delivered to the colonial government at a "market" price set by the government. Determined targets were set for 50 million trees to be planted in the first year, 1832-33 and 40 million the following year. By 1840 330 million coffee trees were allegedly rising in Java, though this number began to fall away in following years as the limits of the system were reached.

## Transition in Ecological System:

"Coffee revolutionized the demand from international trade and changed the agricultural landscape of some Indonesian regions almost beyond recognition." (Boomgaard, 1997) The Dutch introduced quite a few commercial crops, but the two most flourishing during the life of the system proved to be coffee and sugar. Coffee was a high ground crop, and its impact on food crop cultivation was at first less severe. Most of Java's mountain peoples practised an alternative of shifting cultivation, and it was simply sufficient to confine them to lesser land areas without instantly intimidating their survival. The general impact of coffee on the highlands was still nothing less than radical. In just a few years it replaced a compound forest ecology, in which human farming was but a little part, with commercial venture that conquered the mountain environment.

In 1830, in an attempt to make more revenues through the production of export crops, the government introduced compulsory cultivation in upland "west lands". Colonial power, not free capital, led the system in this economic alteration. The cool mountain terrains of the Tengger highlands proved to be right for the most profitable of the European government's cultivars, coffee. From 1830 to 1850, all land between 600 and 1200 meters above sea level was exposed of its forest and changed into one huge coffee stand. At first, the cultivated area was only punctuated by irregular native settlements. Soon, land-hungry migrants poured into the highlands. Between 1807 and 1930 the mountain population augmented from 5661 to 104,070, as compared with the boost of 37,000 to 322,033 in the regency as a whole. Most of the upland enlargement occurred in the mid-slope coffee lands. The upper slope territories escaped the most part of the invasion, because they were too cold and cloud-covered to hold up coffee, and because the government wished to set aside reserves for the Hindus native to the area. Though they were safe from the colonist attack, it would not be long before these non-Muslim Javanese also felt the full crash of colonialism.

As all over Java, two modes of planting were used in establishing government tracts. The one, preferred by Dutch officials, was the "orderly garden", in which the whole forest was cut. Coffee and shade trees would then be planted on the exposed land. This pattern of deforestation exposed soils to the harsh sun, winds, and rains of the East Javanese monsoon.

Opening of the coffee terrace figures highly in socio-economic transform. Its basic character calls for closer inspection. Environmental needs give a rational point of departure. The coffee plant, *coffea Arabica*, requires moderate heat, which in the otherwise hot weather of Java is found only at an elevation of between 650 and 1,600 metres, rain in the area of 1,500mm. per year, high-quality drainage, and protection from wind, sun, and the effects of humid downpours. Virgin tropical forest soils are best in that they still hold a wealthy coating of humus, although this is somewhat less significant here given the high nitrate content of

Java's volcanic soils. A last obligation is the building of terraces due to the bushes' sensitivity to drainage. Too vertical a hill results in a quick overflow, which carries nutrients with it; too small slope endangers the plants by drowning. Like sawah, coffee cultivation requires synthetic surroundings for controlling water-borne nutrients. Coffee terraces thus constituted a new environmental place in West Java. As an enduring, non-irrigated pasture they resembled tipar; as a terraced arrangement they resembled sawah. Yet the exact requirements of weather and drainage differentiated them from both, as well as from gaga (Hoadley, 1994).

Transition in the Social Order by the Emergence of Local Officials and Regents  
Terrace agriculture for coffee was a rational addition of the contingent system. Since coffee was not obtainable by any other means, of need the Company occupied in its production. Princes' and Regents' terraces made likely a stable provider of commercial supplies. This was then obtained by the Company within the structure of the contingent system. To this end, terrace agriculture was supported by Batavia via "technical advisors" sent out to the regencies.

The number of European overseas was augmented and their income made completely dependent upon the production of coffee in that area. It goes without saying that these men often interfered quite freely in the dealings of the regents, even though they were formally their subordinates. The instruction of 1789 went as far as to create the overseers accountable for the general management of the regents' official conduct. Random deed on their part against lower native officials, without discussion of the regents themselves, was far from rare (Schrieke, 1955).

Local officials set about expanding the production of the commercial crops with zest, because they were rewarded with a generous premium, in proportion to total output. The cultivation of the coffee thus grew considerably after 1832, as numerous coffee trees were planted in many parts of Java. By 1834, the island reportedly had 187, 185, 108 coffee trees, a little over two-third of them newly planted. As a result of this expansion, Java's production rose significantly. The export figures suggest that the bulk of coffee exported from Indonesia came from Java well into the early 1880s. Most coffee came from the compulsory deliveries, attesting to the great labour services that the state imposed on peasants.

#### Structural Transition of Peasantry:

Coffee was not originally incorporated among the crops to be produced by peasants under the Cultivation System, but after a long discuss, it was decreed to be a compulsory crop in 1832. This was apparently to put an end to abuses that had supposedly become extensive in the coffee sector, due to the ever-present power of private traders. From now on, specific peasant communities were to provide the government with coffee at the price of 25 guilders per pikul (62 kilos). Two-fifth of this amount, that is, 10 guilders, was at first deducted to meet costs of transport from the store to the port of export. In areas where "land rent" was not being raised, cultivators were paid at cheap rates (Fernando, 2003).

The pull for immigrants was the accessibility of forest land for family agriculture. The government attempted to control forest opening, but did so mainly to defend its own commercial interests. It set aside the flattest and most productive mountain lands its own coffee, leaving the native population to cultivate trivial hillside lands. During most of the nineteenth century, the Tengger highlands had at least some border areas where immigrants could obtain land. With the exemption of native officials, most families received small holdings of one to two hectares. By restricting peasant separation in the way, the government assured itself a big group of workers, since, as in the low lands, landowners were subject to the highest labour tax. Overall, government program served to strengthen a prototype of peasant's small holding rather than differentiating rural society into capitalist farmers and landless workers.

Coffee prefers a highland location, does not require irrigation, and requires a comparatively steady labour force than the seasonably changeable one than sugar; thus, it was grown on so-called "waste" land, for the most part under the labour-tax process. Coffee assessments were levied in terms of the number of trees each conscripted family had to care for. Coffee remote from the peasant agriculture would become an estate crop. Instead, in the final three decades of the Colonial Period, about 60 percent of Indonesia's coffee production was coming from small holders.

Such a scheme obviously leads to the configuration of cooperative estates, manned by enduring, fully-proletarianized workers. Although under the Culture System work was still drained approximately completely from the lower-lying rice villages, factual plantations, with coolie settlements established on or around them, soon developed, chiefly in eastern Java where the provider of landless peasants was obtainable from well-populated but largely sawahless Madura. By the middle of 1800 for the three coffee estates, 100 percent of the coolies were housed on and by the estate. The isolation of the coffee cultivation on enclave European estates made the barrier to the drift of a commercial orientation to agriculture into the peasant sector.

#### Feudalisation of Peasantry as a result of Dutch Dominance over Cultivation:

It is the argument here that some sort of "feudalization" process was taking place. An account, although only practical, for demanding imposts from the direct pro-

ducers runs as follows. According to the just-cited sources, direct producers were not only sedentary but also performed a number of new services for the administrative elite in the form of cultivation and generally the same time there developed an idea of the administrative elite controlling access to the means of production. Decided, this ownership is documentable only for coffee terraces of the type created in 1729 and listed in the Notice of that year. However, in view of the forbid on free movement of the direct producers, the same sort of procedure would have been at work with view to necessary production.

#### Conclusion:

The government in 1899 introduced a Land Rent Law that acknowledged village borders, consolidating smaller villages into larger managerial entities. In Pasuruan, the number of administrative villages was reduced from about 500 to 241. The same program surveyed lands, demarcated village borders, and congested vast areas of forest to cultivation. The program represented a turnaround of government policies on midslope settlement. At the height of the Cultivation system, peasants had been encouraged to live diffuse in distant settlements, neighbouring to the government coffee stands they tended. With its removal from coffee cultivation, the government forced the midslope peasants into nucleated settlements like those in the upper slope highlands. Its intention was to improve control of the rural population and watch forest use (Hefner, 1990).

Toward the end of the century, the amount of open land diminished as road building and land shortage brought land-hungry immigrants from the lowlands. The arrival was so great that, by 1910, there was in effect no more land to be had. In an attempt to control lowland flooding, the government returned a big part of its coffee stands to natural forest and relocated their native cultivators down slope. Between 1910 and the mid 1920s private lands were surveyed, village boundaries were demarcated, the forests were replanted, and the remaining government land was redistributed to local farmers. An area of highland border mobility had come to an end.

Apart from that, the position of peasants or direct producers remained same or worsened gradually. Unlike the other products of forced cultivation like sugar, coffee cultivation did not led to a commercialization of agriculture. For that, not only ecology but colonial policy for the coffee defines these restrictions. Transportation system like building of roads or railways improved during this period but it created such a condition where peasants could stick to the coffee terraces far away from the market. Transportation only used to transport coffee to market area and for the supply of foodstuffs for the terraces. As a result of this, it led to a system of re-feudalization process, rather than a capitalist economy. Population growth and output of land increased but not per capita income of peasants and output per head. The overall picture of the coffee cultivation of Java shows the extraction of surplus by primitive accumulation in a non-capitalist way and which resulted a land-less proletariat peasantry who were before the system used to be the free peasants.

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